BUILDING INTERCULTURAL PARTNERSHIPS

Working with a Chinese Partner

A Guide to Establish Effective
Cross-Cultural Communication
and Working Relationships in China

IN-COUNTRY
ORIENTATION
PROGRAM
(ICOP)

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CENTRE FOR INTERCULTURAL TRAINING (CIT)
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Working with a Chinese Partner

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FOREWORD

Working with a Chinese Partner is one in a series of guides designed to help Canadians and Asians work together effectively. The idea for the series came from years of experience preparing Canadian technical advisors for work in developing nations and their foreign counterparts for missions to Canada as part of Canada's international development assistance programs. Although many guides were available to help them prepare for culture shock and learn the practicalities of living overseas, there were few good resources to assist them in developing effective working relationships, one of the most challenging and critically important aspects of their overseas experience.

The guide is modeled after *Thais Do Business the Thai Way*, which was produced by the SVITA Foundation of Bangkok for CIDA.

Working with a Chinese Partner is for Canadians who work with Chinese in an international development, business or official capacity. It offers practical advice on forming partnerships and alliances based on trust, understanding and effective communication.

An original draft was prepared by Marvin Tyler, a Canadian based in Beijing, under the direction of Zhang Duoyi, the Coordinator of CIDA's In-Country Orientation Program (ICOP) in Beijing. Kathleen Speake of Speake Justinich Associates of Ottawa provided additional input. The guide was revised and edited by Stiles Associates Inc. of Ottawa.

We welcome your comments, suggestions and insights for subsequent editions. Please write to us or send us a facsimile message. We hope your stay in China is rewarding.

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INTRODUCTION

In the increasingly global nature of our world, people live abroad or travel internationally for work in the public, private and non-governmental sectors. Whether stationed in a foreign country for a few days or a few years, one's success depends on one's willingness to adapt to and learn about different cultures.

Moves related to work may involve individuals or entire families. The stress and strain of moving to another country, combined with culture shock, language differences, family problems, and pressure to show results quickly, can make an overseas stay an unpleasant experience.

Working with a Chinese Partner aims to give you, and newly-arrived Canadians like you, an outline of what you may encounter in your business dealings and work environment in China. It gives you contextual information about your Chinese partners and their organizations. It provides suggestions for establishing good communication and cohesive working relationships.

This guide addresses some specific cultural nuances: what you need to know to function comfortably and efficiently; how to work with a Chinese partner (and how this differs from working with most Canadian partners); and, not to be forgotten, how to make your stay in China enjoyable.

The guide won't teach you every single facet of Chinese culture; there are aspects of Chinese culture that most Chinese themselves don't know. You won't become more-Chinese-than-the-Chinese by reading this guide, but you will begin to understand Chinese attitudes, values, and ways of working and relating. A word of caution. It is not your job to assimilate completely. Be sensitive to cultural differences but retain your character!

We provide no hard and fast rules on how to go about conducting your business in China. Each person and each situation is different. Even so, a bit of reading and some understanding of Chinese culture will help to ensure your stay is personally and professionally rewarding.

WHAT IS A PARTNERSHIP?

A partnership is a strategic alliance or relationship between two or more people. Successful partnerships are often based on trust, equality, and mutual understanding and obligations. Partnerships can be formal, where each party's roles and obligations are spelled out in a written agreement, or informal, where the roles and obligations are assumed or agreed to verbally. You may be able to choose your partner or, as is often the case, your partner may be assigned to you.

Partners are often necessary when working in a foreign country, not only to bridge language barriers, but also to help you perform your work efficiently without falling into the traditional cross-cultural traps one encounters in a foreign setting.

Working with Chinese partners allows you to become acquainted with Chinese society rapidly. You will be able to meet the right people quickly instead of spending valuable time building up your own network. Your Chinese partnerships can help you avoid cultural blunders along the way.

Working with a partner is, of course, fraught with dangers. A partnership that has gone sour can cause bitter feelings and spoil your mission or a new business deal. It is important for both parties to be open-minded and accepting of the other's differences. There must be a willingness to learn and adapt. Both partners must be willing to exchange their technical knowledge and their cultural survival skills.

WORKING WITH A CHINESE PARTNER: *How it Differs from Working with a Canadian Partner* ◆ ◆ ◆

> *It's a funny thing; the French call it a couteau, the Germans call it a messer, but we call it a knife, which is after all what it is.*
> -Richard Jenkyns

China has existed as a distinct cultural entity for a very long time with enduring traditions, customs, and systems. There are pros and cons to Chinese and Canadian methods: skill transfer is inevitably two-way. As a Canadian with years of training and experience, you may arrive in China confident in your abilities and determined to pass them on to your new colleagues. However, if you are sensitive to your new environment, and take the time to observe and learn, you will discover that no expertise, regardless of how well it worked at home, can be transferred unaltered in a new cultural environment.

Skills and knowledge, if they are to be transferred, must be useful and must be adapted to Chinese needs and contexts. Nothing will be gained by technical advisors or business persons adopting the inflexible attitude that their way is the only way a job can be done. In fact, such an attitude will likely cause resentment and hinder trust and cooperation on which strong partnerships are based.

In order to understand how the Chinese might feel about your role in their country, you might simply think of how you would react if the roles were reversed. Chinese methods and systems have been developed in the context of a collectivist, hierarchical society as opposed to that of western countries which are generally pluralistic and individualistic. As a Canadian business person or technical advisor, you will certainly have a contribution to make. Still, you will likely be more successful if you adapt your methods and approach to the Chinese reality rather than trying to accomplish the reverse.

One Canadian advisor tells a story about introducing in-baskets at her office as a way to keep track of documents and increase efficiency. Her partners shared her enthusiasms for the baskets, but did not change the way they worked. After a few months the Canadian was using her in-basket as a storage bin. Rather than embarrass her by saying it would not work, her

Chinese partners allowed her to come to her own conclusion and save face.

Cross-cultural experiences may best be enjoyed through relationships with Chinese people. Although Chinese people are generally less outgoing when it comes to meeting strangers than westerners, there will be many opportunities to make acquaintances and develop friendships. But understand, there are both cultural and official constraints that can affect contacts between Chinese people and foreigners.

Officially, westerners are perceived as a possible threat, a potential source of "spiritual pollution" leading to moral decadence. This attitude often restricts contact between Chinese people and foreigners. In your office or workplace, you may develop a very good rapport with your Chinese colleagues only to find it does not extend beyond general socializing. Of course, establishing friendships or personal relationships depends on a number of factors, but a limiting factor affecting your Chinese associates could be that they have been discouraged from "getting too close to the foreigner."

This official position does not represent the attitude of all Chinese people, many of whom seek contact with foreigners. It may not even prevent the development of warm, personal relationships between you and those who have been warned. Although close friendships with Chinese people may take time to develop, they will be a very important and rewarding part of your experience in China.

Recognize that culture determines attitudes and values. The way we perceive ourselves, our social roles and obligations, and the way we define and tackle problems are shaped by our own experience. If we recognize this, we are less likely to judge behaviour by Canadian standards and values. We can then develop strategies sensitive to the cultural context. If you can understand something about the values and motivations of your partners, you are much more likely to be successful.

Applying individual traits to a whole nation can be very misleading and descend into meaningless stereotyping. If it is done with care, however, it can provide a framework for understanding the values and beliefs that are widely shared in Chinese society.

China Today

China has the fastest growing economy in the world. The country, with its huge potential market, is attracting large inputs of capital. Manufacturers are seeking to take advantage of low labour costs. The sharp upturn in the Chinese economy is in an embryonic stage. Most citizens still ride bicycles and earn, in a month, what a Canadian family may spend on a single meal in a fast-food restaurant.

It is a country of contrasts. There are large cosmopolitan cities. In Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou, for example, you will find tall office towers, streets jammed with people and traffic, pollution, five-star hotels, discos and clubs, high fashion, and a wide variety of both western and Asian cultural activities such as theatre, concerts and dance. The Chinese dictum, "To get rich is glorious," is a message readily embraced by many. You may see someone making a business deal on a cellular phone while riding a bicycle down the street. You will also see beggars and itinerant workers dressed in rags, sleeping outside railway stations.

In rural areas, there are similar contrasts. Rich farmers, who have made money selling specialty vegetables on the open market, are building two-story farm houses. Elsewhere, peasants live in mud and straw huts, scratching out a living equivalent to less than $100 a year. Vast numbers of rural people, who make up between 70% and 80% of the population, have not yet become a part of the cash economy or are very poor, with little opportunity for schooling, medical care, or employment. Most of the economic development has touched only the coastal areas of the south and east.

One of the many interesting observations one can make about China is the way in which it has resisted outside influences. Since the Mongol Invasion in the twelfth century, the country has twice been totally controlled by non-Han invaders (Mongols during the Yuan Dynasty; Manchus, Qing Dynasty). The Chinese people were heavily dominated by western European and American commercial interests during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But throughout these periods Chinese culture prevailed, absorbing both Mongol and Manchu influences, and almost completely rejecting western influence. Chinese culture has remained strong and exclusive to this day.

In many ways, China's "cultural superiority" has been both its strength and weakness. Although its culture has

remained vibrant, isolation from a world that has advanced technologically has left China with little capability to resist exploitation. (Further isolation followed when the present regime took power in 1949. It was not until 1972 that the People's Republic of China and the United States established diplomatic relations, beginning the slow process of opening the door to western technology and development.)

So, one should not assume China's need for western expertise, technology and capital resources extends to an acceptance of western cultural values. History and the official prevailing attitude may resist, as much as possible, any "cultural pollution," but as the door opens ever wider, western cultural values will have an influence on the Chinese people.

Change *is* taking place. Culturally, Chinese people have more and more contact with foreigners and foreign ideas in their own country, travelling abroad to study or conduct business, and through exposure to the western media. Economically, the change in the last few years has been nothing short of sensational.

Such rapid growth makes great demands on existing infrastructure and systems. It causes problems of dislocation. But this is all to be expected. China is attempting to do a great deal: create a market economy; dismantle much of its state support; and put its huge money-gobbling state-run and state-operated industries on a profitable basis.

As Canadians, we have many initial advantages in China. Generally, we are well regarded, thanks in part to Norman Bethune. (Until recent years, all Chinese school children were required to memorize four poems by Mao Tse-tung, one of which honoured the Canadian doctor.) We do not arrive with great power or ex-colonial baggage. Regardless, our future success as a nation, and as individual Canadians working in China, will depend on being sensitive to Chinese people and culture, and our willingness to accept that we are their guests. We must be observant and learn how Chinese systems work, how decisions are made, and how our Chinese counterparts make their own systems function. Most of all, we must understand that an attitude of superiority will not work and will lead only to frustration, perhaps even failure. With this in mind, a Chinese experience can be very enjoyable and rewarding.

UNDERSTANDING CHINESE CULTURE

> *All people are the same; it is only their habits that are different.*
> -Confucius

Everyone is aware there are major differences between Chinese and western culture. Despite this fact, westerners are still often frustrated and culturally shocked by the extent of the differences. But the more you learn and become aware of them, the better you will be able to cope as you go about your life and work in China.

If there is one single, all-embracing point to be made to a Canadian working in China, it would be to never assume anything, not even what you consider to be the most basic of understandings. Sometimes what you see as abnormal, the Chinese will see as normal. When you think you have an understanding or agreement, the Chinese will understand only that you have reached a particular point in the negotiations. Quite often, what you take for granted, based on *your* cultural bias, is interpreted differently by the Chinese, based on *their* cultural bias.

How then, do you survive in China? How do you cope? How do you even manage your daily life? Some expats simply ignore everything that does not fit into their cultural framework and, in effect, wall themselves off from China, the Chinese people, and the complications caused by cultural differences. It is an interesting reaction given that Chinese people, themselves, live within a system of personal walls that shut them off from strangers. Although these expats may manage to cope quite well, they miss the extraordinary benefits of developing and experiencing cross-cultural relationships. They learn nothing, or very little, about China.

Although many traditions were officially cast off during the Cultural Revolution, much of the basic framework of Chinese society remains. Some traditions are important to the social fabric of China, to the family, friendships and *danwei* (work unit) relationships, to the concept of hospitality and courtesy, and to values.

Collectivism and Conformity

> *The bamboo that grows too high gets chopped off.*
> -Chinese maxim

There is a strong collective impulse in China, with an emphasis on stability and conformity. People from a collective tradition value process, consensus, cooperation and harmony; personal goals take second place to the betterment of the whole.

The *danwei* is perhaps the single most important organization in the life of almost every urban Chinese worker. Along with a job and salary, it provides housing, schooling, medical care, a percentage of salary in the event of lay-off, a retirement pension, a social structure, friendships, food supplements and subsidies, and sometimes even meals. The list of benefits goes on. The *danwei* is a comprehensive, paternalistic provider to the Chinese people.

Many changes have taken place since the beginning of the 1990s when China began dismantling the "Iron Rice Bowl" (an euphemism describing the all-encompassing *danwei* system and the paternalistic role it plays in people's lives). China began the slow process of modernizing its huge, cumbersome and largely stagnant economy following the Cultural Revolution and the ascendancy of Deng Xiaoping. As these changes (known in China as the development of a "Socialist Market Economy") accelerated, Chinese leaders began to dismantle the "Iron Rice Bowl."

In some cases, this dismantling has meant the *danwei* has laid-off staff, opened up the housing market and, increasingly, required people to buy their existing homes or find other accommodation. Food subsidies have been cut back to the point where almost all commodities are now priced on a market system. User fees for special services have crept into the medical system and education costs have risen. Lay-offs have increased in some areas as state-owned and state-managed industries struggle to become profitable. In some cases where workers have been laid off, there has been rioting, resulting in property damage and personal injury.

Increasingly, Chinese people are opting for more profitable, sometimes more autonomous, free market jobs. Since Deng Xiaoping toured South China at the beginning of January 1992 and commented "to get rich is

glorious," the free market has been booming, attracting talented and enterprising Chinese people who would otherwise have been employed by government jobs or in state-owned or state-managed industries. Those who work in the private sector have none of the state benefits associated with the "Iron Rice Bowl." Often not accepted, they are frequently the target of jealousy (the "red eye disease").

Most Canadian technical advisors on joint-venture projects will be working with Chinese management and staff who are in a *danwei*. Although technical advisors come and go, you should remember your Chinese colleagues remain, often in the same *danwei*, for a lifetime. A Canadian with very un-Chinese ideas and ways of doing things can be unsettling in this context. Changes introduced by you, unless accepted by the partner organization's leaders and integrated by them, are unlikely to be sustained. Once you leave China, your Chinese colleagues are likely to revert to their organization's culture and environment.

Some Chinese staff may not be willing to run the risk of intimidation by continuing western ways of doing things after you have gone. There are tactics to keep group members in line. Although it is rare for workers to be demoted or dismissed from employment, those who are in disfavour with the leader may be shunned or simply given no work to do. As an old Chinese saying goes, "the nail that sticks up is hammered down."

Authority ◆ ◆ ◆

> *The two most fundamental aspects of social behaviour [in Chinese society] are control and association.*
> -Michael Harris Bond (1991)

Authority goes with age or seniority, position or status. As a result, the concept of the patriarch is very important. Juniors show deference to seniors and the dictates of the leaders are not questioned. Such behaviour is considered upright, prudent and a benefit to society. Control is normally from the top down.

Not challenging authority directly, however, should not be confused with acceptance. There are many more prudent ways around the system. An

old Chinese proverb states: "The mountains are high, and the emperor is far away." Here is a somewhat amusing example. During the Nationalist period in China, the government based in Nanjing declared that there be no government offices in the International Settlements in Shanghai. There were already many there and it would have been costly and inconvenient to relocate them. Instead of voicing any opposition, Shanghai officials agreed with the policy. Meanwhile, they quietly renamed the offices located in the settlements.

Responsibility and Decision-making ◆ ◆ ◆

> *One less responsibility is better than one more.*
> *Unnecessary efforts bring unnecessary problems.*
> Chinese maxims

Much of social, economic and political activity in China is organized around groups. Even though decision-making is hierarchical and authority centralized, the process is consensual. Many people are consulted before a decision is ratified and implemented. The process is deliberate, time-consuming, and what most Canadians might consider excessively cautious. Implementing national legislation can take years since all levels of government have an opportunity to review it.

In our daily working lives in Canada, we have some degree of decision-making authority and we assume our Chinese counterparts have it as well. They do not. This has serious implications for getting things done in China. How do you know who is responsible for decisions? It is information not readily volunteered. Who do you approach when you require a certain course of action? Often no one can tell you. It can be very frustrating.

The hierarchical structure of Chinese society is manifest in China's bureaucratic organizations. Decision-making is normally centralized among a few, often with very little, if any, downward delegation of authority. Chinese people prefer an authoritative leader who is considerate, capable, and who provides clear-cut directions. Individual initiative is unlikely to flourish in such an environment. If an employee or lower leader takes initiative, it may be viewed as being aggressive, encroaching on their supervisor's authority, or attempting to seek power. Assuming a high profile, standing out from the group by taking initiative, or

assuming responsibility for anything not specifically assigned are actions that invite criticism or punishment.

Employees are expected to follow leaders' directions almost without question. Challenging authority can have serious and harmful consequences. When differences between those in authority and their subordinates cannot be avoided, the subordinates must be as ambiguous and unassertive as possible in trying to persuade their superiors. If the superiors wind up making decisions or demanding actions that are unacceptable, it is common for subordinates to resist passively. For example, they might react slowly, make excuses, fail to understand or simply stay away from work. Decision-making in a Chinese organization can be very cumbersome. Bringing about change can be slow and difficult.

A Canadian entering this environment with a mandate to change things may have a rough time. Success will come only as a result of both partners' patience, persistence, skill, trust and understanding. Decisions may be made and agreed to, but your partner may take no action to implement them. Your solutions to mutually identified problems may be ignored. Your partners may offer reasons why they are inappropriate or cannot be done. It is incumbent upon you to ferret out the reasons for inaction and develop elegant and mutually acceptable solutions. You will have to be attuned to the "Chinese way" and sensitive to your partners' situation. You will have to observe, listen, learn and develop an appreciation for the restrictions and power structure in which your partners must function. From time to time you may not get it right, resulting in passive resistance or outright lack of cooperation from your Chinese colleagues.

It is a good strategy to court the senior people in the office. Each office has powerful, respected leaders. If you build a good working relationship with them, they can help you navigate the system.

Face and Guanxi ◆ ◆ ◆

> *Loss of Honour is loss of life.*
> -Fang Xuan Ling, Tang Dynasty

Face and *guanxi*, the accumulated personal capital or indebtedness between individuals, are interrelated fundamental aspects of Chinese

culture. They are at the very core of the system of interpersonal relationships and often the key to making a hierarchical and bureaucratic system work. Personal relationships may extend over several levels, including family and friends, *danwei* colleagues and associates, schoolmates and casual acquaintances.

Canadian use of the term "face" is much more restrictive than Chinese use. We are concerned about not "looking bad." In Canada, it is the individual's responsibility for his or her own well-being. In China, however, the face of the individual is a collective responsibility, and face can be given or taken away.

To lose face, or to cause another to lose face, is a very serious concern. As a result, any form of direct confrontation leading to the emergence of winners and losers must be avoided whenever possible, even though it may require one to be evasive or ambiguous. Fear of losing face can make Chinese people very sensitive to insult.

Face is given when indebtedness is honoured. It is important for a Chinese person to build up and maintain face in order to shape a powerful and influential image. The more important one appears to be, the more likely one's requests will be granted. On the other hand, people go to elaborate lengths to give face to others and prevent them from losing it. Giving face may mean offering gifts and lavish compliments or treating someone with great respect, for example, by using a title such as *Lao*.

Foreigners will be forgiven for not understanding the social conventions related to face. If your views and inclinations differ from your colleagues, be consistent in your message and make sure you communicate why you feel as you do. Don't get shammed into doing something you strongly oppose because someone has told you your decision will cause them to lose face. It is important our partners understand why Canadians might hold a particular view, and how that view may be valued in our society. After all, this is part of a successful exchange. That said, learn to let the little things go and avoid situations that might embarrass your partner. Embarrassing a Chinese person in public can lead to retribution. They might not get angry, but they will get even.

For minor loss of face, a Chinese person will pretend it never happened. Go along with the pretence, but gradually try to improve your relationship by paying special attention to the offended person. In general, you should treat any face-losing situation seriously. According to Chinese tradition, you have both lost face and

your credibility is severely affected. Approach the person privately or use a go-between. Apologize profusely. Be especially respectful of the person in the future, and try to find ways of giving face. For example, do something to enhance their reputation or present them with a small gift.

One Canadian recalls trying to fire a term employee who was lazy, incompetent and corrupt. It took months of delicate manoeuvring to get rid of him, even though both Canadian and Chinese staff agreed he must go. The preservation of harmonious relations was more important than months of inefficiency and disruption. The employee was never told he was incompetent. A face-saving excuse was invented and the appearance of harmony was preserved. In the end, he was treated like a valued employee and given a farewell banquet at a restaurant of his choosing. The Canadian had to foot the bill, but did so happily. Handling the situation with any less care might have resulted in an act of revenge.

> *Chinese go through life wearing masks. The ones that tradition decrees. The ones that society decrees.*
> -Betty Bao Lord, Legacies

Guanxi, indebtedness, can extend over long periods of time and be used either for oneself or to promote the cause of another. In order for *guanxi* to work, a person must have face. It would be unthinkable for a Chinese person to ask a favour without having enough personal prestige to expect the request to be granted. To ask and be denied would be an unacceptable loss of face.

You will discover you have earned *guanxi* simply by being involved in a project. For example, you can anticipate gifts from Chinese people who have received project benefits (or who wish to). Frequently the gifts are tokens and should be received gracefully. *Guanxi* should not be regarded as a form of bribery, as it would be in Canada. *Guanxi* is an obligation which you may or may not choose to acknowledge or accept, depending on the situation and your ability to respond.

A Canadian in China will find many things that seemed impossible are, in fact, accomplished through the use of his or her own *guanxi* and that of Chinese colleagues or their friends and associates.

Family, Friends and Other Relationships ◆ ◆ ◆

> *The gradual development of honourable relationships and cooperative sentiments must precede great achievements.*
> -The Book of Changes

Relationships and *guanxi* are the currency of business and social life in China. In a country of 1.2 billion people, resources are scarce and *guanxi* acts as a market mechanism. In order to get things done, personal contacts and familial relationships are used in all aspects of daily life, from finding a job to buying an electronic product duty-free. The Chinese have very close family relationships, which they value above everything else. Obligation is used to establish a network that can be called upon in time of need. It is not a cold, calculating exchange, but rather proof the relationship is alive and well.

In China, there are three categories of relationships: effective ties, which are deep, intimate relationships with family and close friends; instrumental ties, which are temporary and useful to gain a practical end (like taking a taxi); and mixed ties, which combine aspects of both.

Relationships between Chinese people are primarily based on family ties with little or no interest shown to strangers or outsiders. Trust is limited to those within this circle. When the Chinese have problems, need help or require a confidant, they turn to family members or close friends, and less frequently to their associates. As a result, a Chinese person will spend most of his or her energy on relationship-building within this circle rather than among strangers, work colleagues or casual acquaintances. Chinese people may show shyness with strangers and rarely initiate a conversation with someone they do not know, except, perhaps, if they wish to practice their English. Although these characteristics will not prevent you from making Chinese friends, it may require considerable time and patience on your part to develop close, trusting relationships.

Because of the high value Chinese people place on family and friendships, your Chinese colleagues will have obligations and responsibilities which will require them to miss work from time to time. Expect parents of school-aged children to take time off to meet with teachers. Colleagues may

be required to take meals to hospitalized family members during the day. Your Chinese partner might need time off to sit with a terminally-ill friend sent home to die.

Chinese people also attach great importance to pregnancy and child birth. Your partner organization may make special allowances for pregnant staff members, permitting them, for example, to leave work early or do less work than normal. After the child is born, the mother may be given much longer leave with pay than Canadians receive.

Canadians are accustomed to a wide circle of friends who change over time. Once established, Chinese people will maintain friendships forever. Friends are expected to share in most aspects of each other's lives. The responsibilities and obligations might be considered onerous to a Canadian.

Chinese friends spend a very high portion of their non-work time with each other. They routinely drop over unexpectedly at any time of the day or night, yet this is not considered an infringement of privacy. The sharing of personal items and private business is expected and taken for granted, regardless of how valuable the items may be or how personal the business. Criticism and advice between friends are often given and accepted without resentment. Considerable physical contact (such as hand-holding, arms around each other) takes place between friends of the same sex.

For Canadians, it is acceptable to have a series of casual relationships with members of the opposite sex. In contrast, Chinese expect and condone very few. Romantic physical contact of any sort is an acknowledgment of strong attachment. Hugging and hand-holding can convey serious romantic intent among traditional Chinese. A Canadian should understand that any physical contact can have serious implications. Physical contact in public is not accepted traditionally, even between husband and wife, although this is changing among younger urban people. If you do show affection to your husband or wife in front of Chinese friends, be prepared for "oohs" and "ahs."

Women ◆ ◆ ◆

If you are a Canadian woman working in China, you may receive a few sexist remarks. If your are married, you may find Chinese men defer to your husband at first. But once you establish your credibility, you will have no problem. Youth is a more serious barrier than gender. Like Canada,

China has few women in senior positions. The Chinese constitution acknowledges the full equality of women and there are many females in what Canadians would call non-traditional jobs such as doctors and engineers.

You may be in the position to encourage the active participation of women colleagues. On many occasions, women are overlooked because their bosses just assume they have family responsibilities that prevent them from playing more active roles in a project.

Time and Space ◆ ◆ ◆

> *Do not be in too much of a hurry to get things done. Do not see only petty gains. If a man hurries too much, things will not be done well, or thoroughly. If he sees only minor advantages, nothing great is accomplished.*
>
> -Confucius

Apart from arriving and departing on time, Chinese don't tend to be as preoccupied as Canadians are with the "efficient" use of time. Appointments may be delayed or not kept at all, and guests may arrive early (a demonstration of deep respect). Friends may drop by without previous arrangements (out of consideration since then the host does not have to make elaborate arrangements). You will receive last-minute dinner invitations.

In Canada, we tend to focus on productivity in the work place. We expect everything to be done now (or yesterday). Most of our places of employment have an appraisal system based on individual goals and achievements. Canadian workers usually have the authority, the information, and the tools to get things done efficiently.

In China, although productivity and output are not ignored, they usually take a back seat to harmony, the process by which goals are achieved. Mid-level employees rarely have the authority to make decisions. Jobs tend to be very narrowly defined, and it is often difficult to find the one person who knows how to perform a certain task. Interruptions are common, and you are expected to deal with each request as it comes up. A long lunch hour and nap are part of the work day. In fact, rest time is a right guaranteed under Article 49 of the Chinese constitution.

Time usage is a potential source of frustration for both partners. Chinese people believe Canadians are obsessed with scheduling every minute of the work day. To many Chinese, we don't take a calculated, careful approach when introducing sensitive or important matters. We pursue our goals too vigorously and directly. On the other hand, many Canadians question why it takes so much time to get things done in China.

Chinese people are less concerned and more tolerant than westerners about personal physical space. No wonder. Recent population figures in Shanghai show 89,000 people per square mile, more than four times the population density of Toronto. The Chinese have learned to live within their own personal walls that exclude strangers, regardless of their physical proximity.

Many westerners may be very uncomfortable in crowded buses, trains and market places. One of the more intimidating experiences can be the common street scene: buses look unbelievably crowded with still more people trying to force their way through doors; traffic appears chaotic; cars come from all directions; and bicycles fill every conceivable space between vehicles. Newly arrived Canadians commonly ask, "How do I cross the street?" Being in the thick of it is less intimidating than observing from the sidelines. Get out on your bicycle or whatever transportation method you choose, and integrate.

Learning Styles ◆ ◆ ◆

Although learning styles differ from one individual to another, most Chinese people have been exposed to an education system which gives greater priority to memorizing information than self-expression or analytical skills. A key learning objective is to be able to state information and theories or quote authoritative texts, rather than subject information to critical analysis. When making presentations, Canadians should be brief and to the point, packaging key points in concise formulas which can be recalled.

COMMUNICATION

> *When you are examining yourself in every movement, every word, and every action, you will make very few mistakes.*
>
> -Confucius

Oral and Written ◆ ◆ ◆

Person-to-person dialogue is the preferred method of communication in China. Phone calls are used less often, in part because China has a poor telephone system. (It is common for a caller to hang up before good-byes are said.) Letter-writing and faxes are the least preferred. Writing requires translation and typing which are overworked services. Also, committing something to paper requires the approval of many people up and down the bureaucracy. The Chinese are reluctant to have something on paper that may come back to haunt them later. Chinese people may regard the written form as conveying more commitment, responsibility and finality than they wish to communicate.

Try sounding out your partners. Encourage them to express their needs and desires verbally before going to writing. However, if decisions become lost in endless rounds of discussion or "yes, but-ing," a written format may help force a resolution. Obviously, you will have to determine when it is best to abandoned one approach for another.

Harmony and Conflict ◆ ◆ ◆

> *If there is sincerity in the heart,*
> *there will be beauty in the character.*
> *If there is beauty in the character,*
> *There will be harmony in the home.*
> *If there is harmony in the home,*
> *there will be order in the nation.*
> *When there is order in the nation,*
> *there will be peace in the world.*
>
> -Great Learning, Third Century B.C.

Harmony and avoiding the appearance of conflict in relationships, are highly valued in Chinese society. Differences are greatly suppressed in hierarchical societies, and the Chinese have developed very effective, non-confrontational ways of communicating disagreement.

Chinese people place the greatest emphasis on striking the right balance with someone, or developing the relationship, rather than discussing the topic at hand. In a discussion, Canadians are more inclined to assert their position. You are more likely to succeed if you avoid anger, confrontation or verbal criticism which tend to polarize situations and lead to loss of face. Seek an elegant resolution, a subtle way to avoid a conflict, and a win-win solution. Use a mutually trusted go-between if necessary. Resolve differences outside of meetings.

Context and Style ◆ ◆ ◆

High context cultures, like that of the Chinese, pay more attention to the interaction process itself. Anticipate that discussions may take longer in China than they do in Canada. There is considerably longer lead-in to the issues, followed by a longer lead-out. A great deal of discussion takes place before and after the main topic of the meeting has been raised. Rather than confront a person with an issue or disagreement, Chinese people will often approach a difficulty through praise, compliments or by asking indirect questions.

In a low context culture, such as Canada's, meaning is in what is stated explicitly. Your Chinese partners may view a question such as "What's your bottom line?" as insensitive or aggressive. Conversely, your Chinese partners' indirect responses might cause you to incorrectly conclude they are playing games.

Body language carries more meaning in high context cultures than in low context cultures. Physical reaction, or the lack of any kind of response, can convey disagreement more often than something said. Body language tends to be reserved in China. There is little eye contact and few expressive gestures (except in posturing where one witnesses the sweeping Beijing opera movements). Generally, it is very difficult to read the cues, especially coming from Canada where we place emphasis on the spoken word.

Canadians should not interpret their Chinese counterparts' indirect communication style as intentionally

obscure. They must develop skills to understand the meaning behind Chinese ways of communicating. For example, "no" and "yes" have a variety of meanings. "Yes" may indicate the message has been heard and understood, but not necessarily agreed to. "Yes" may mean "no" when it is impolite to say "no" to a guest directly. The fact Canadians are not trained to listen for subtle meaning often leads to misunderstandings and hard feelings.

You may not know you have an agreement with your Chinese counterparts until they actually do what they agreed to do.

Communication Breakdown ◆ ◆ ◆

> *Trouble is born out of the words you speak.*
> -Chinese maxim

Pay close attention to rumours because they often reveal viewpoints people refuse to state directly. Sudden change in behaviour or position may indicate other agendas are operating, or that a breakdown in communication has occurred. Things are not always what they seem.

In general, information is not volunteered, so it is important to ask the right questions. Bad news is often introduced bit by bit to "soften the blow." Wait for the "oh-by-the-way," which generally comes towards the end of the conversation. That is when the full picture is revealed.

Misunderstandings can arise for a host of cultural and linguistic reasons. If your Chinese partners speak English, don't assume their comprehension is good. People who speak English well are often reluctant to admit they don't understand something that was said. There can be great difficulties with interpreters, too.

Misunderstandings can occur between you and your Canadian headquarters. It is often hard for people back home to understand your Chinese environment. Regular and clear communication with them is imperative.

You must work constantly to avoid misunderstandings.

Tips for Improving Communication ◆ ◆ ◆

Re-confirm everything. It is a Chinese communication style to repeat a messages many times during a conversation, perhaps to ensure the meaning has been clearly understood. Ask for clarification or opinions. To help get your point across, use simple straightforward terms that lend themselves to direct translation. If there are no objections, don't assume your partners agree. If there are no questions, don't assume they understand.

Persistence pays off. If something is not happening as you expected, deal with the situation immediately. Face-to-face and written communication will indicate you are serious. One woman arrived in China on a teaching assignment only to find her apartment was not ready. Her work unit put her in a small room with no cooking or washroom facilities. She was told that they would take care of it. Weeks passed and nothing happened. Finally, exasperated and in tears, she angrily confronted the person responsible for housing. She was told that because she did not complain, they had thought the arrangements were satisfactory. She learned from this experience not to let matters rest until they are resolved. In China, it is common practice to badger people until they cave-in. "No" does not necessarily mean "no."

Silence during a discussion can make Canadians edgy. Chinese people are more comfortable with long pauses, and do not feel they have to fill every gap in the conversation. Silence is polite. It signals that you have the undivided attention of your listeners. It can also be used effectively to gently convince your partners to consider another course of action after they have made an unreasonable request.

Consult with your partners from the beginning, and develop new ways of doing things together. It takes time to build trust and support. Nobody likes surprises. Everything is orchestrated in China, so take the time to ensure that everyone is in agreement. Translate your written material into Chinese if you can. If you are faced with voluminous reports from headquarters, summarize the key points on paper and discuss them with your partners.

Listen for the meaning behind the answer. Listening skills are important. In China, reading between the lines is a highly developed art form. Canadians have often been accused of having "big mouths and small ears."

Apologize, when necessary, even if you have not done anything wrong. People in China will apologize because an unfortunate incident has occurred, not necessarily because they feel they are to blame for it. It is considered virtuous to be the first to apologize in order to smooth over some unpleasantness. An apology is not an admission of guilt.

Be brief and factual in your presentations. Clearly structured presentations, with information written on a blackboard or flip-chart, are the most appreciated. Since most Chinese people are unfamiliar with experiential learning techniques and participatory group facilitation methods, you may experience some difficulty introducing them.

Working Effectively with Your Chinese Partner

You may have a tendency to be judgmental because so many of your experiences are different from those at home in Canada. Don't be judgmental; it would be unfair, unproductive, and it could undermine your effectiveness. If you are judgmental, you are likely to be perceived as arrogant by your Chinese partners.

When you first arrive in China, as a Canadian business person or technical advisor, be prepared for a certain amount of skepticism, even rejection on the part of your new Chinese colleagues. Although courteous, some will not offer their sincere friendship at the outset. Your management methods may be viewed as impractical. You should enter the partnership paying close attention to becoming accepted, trusted and credible.

Keep in mind your Chinese partners are very proud of their long and well-established traditions. You will likely have to work hard to convince them that you have something to offer. Quite commonly, they will ask you for advice on how they can improve their products, company or management, for example. This may be a courtesy designed to bring you face as the foreign expert. They may not expect you to take their request seriously. Indeed, they might be offended if you suggest improvements immediately. Keep in mind that they just might regard you as a threat or nuisance, in much the same way Canadian consultants are sometimes regarded when reviewing Canadian organizations.

Although it is dangerous to stereotype people on the basis of perceived differences in personality traits, there are some commonly acknowledged ones. As Canadians, we tend to promote ourselves and consciously attempt to improve our public image both on and off the job. In contrast, Chinese people downplay personal abilities, achievements and contributions, promoting, instead, the attributes of their group. Modesty is considered a virtue. When asked to perform a task they are well qualified for, Chinese people may belittle their own abilities and profess inadequacy. They will greet compliments with diversionary comments such as, "It was my duty." In job interviews, Chinese people traditionally respond only to the questions asked. Even their responses reflect modesty; when their eyes are cast down they appear humble.

Interpreters ◆ ◆ ◆

Whether you speak Mandarin or not, you will find good interpreters useful. They can communicate in a style that is acceptable to Chinese people and can help you understand Chinese responses, no matter how subtle. The interpreter may also help you determine the power structure or decision-making process in a group. In order for your interpreter to be an asset, however, you must first develop a close and trusting relationship. This may take considerable time and effort on your part.

Here are some tips in dealing with interpreters:

- Avoid colloquialisms, culture-bound humour, and cultural references.
- Break frequently to ensure the interpreter has not lost his or her train of thought.
- Engage more than one interpreter for long sessions.
- Speak slowly, especially when referring to numbers.
- Before you begin, meet with interpreters to put them at ease. Explain that you don't mind being interrupted to clarify points. If you have a speech or presentation material, give a copy to the interpreter in advance.
- Always address your remarks to the person you are talking to, not the interpreter. It shows your respect for the other party.
- Listen attentively to the response in Chinese, even if you don't understand a word.
- For a variety of reasons, your interpreter may not be accurate. If there is evidence you are being misunderstood, express your message a different way.
- If you are negotiating a contract or covering technical ground, consider finding a trained technical interpreter. CIDA has trained technical interpreters in a number of sectors. Find out if you have access to them.
- If you have colleagues in the audience, check with them during a break to see if the interpretation is accurate. Ask questions that would reveal whether your message was understood. One Canadian technical advisor spent half a day talking to thirty people who did not understand a word he was saying. The interpreter was not technically competent, and the audience did not want him to lose face by pointing it out. At lunch, the Canadian found out what was going on, thanks to a colleague. The interpreter was told that he must have been very tired after the morning session, and that someone was willing to help out. The colleague took over for the afternoon.

Interpreters can also assist in sensitive matters. They can act as intermediaries, and may even help everyone save face (you can always blame inaccurate interpretation for the misunderstanding). You may not notice a good interpreter, but you *will* notice a bad one.

Effective Management Styles ◆ ◆ ◆

There is no one approach to being effective. Still, experience shows that people who are the most effective in China are flexible. They are willing to make compromises. They have a good understanding of Chinese culture and society and are more tolerant of it.

Chinese people are, by nature, industrious and enterprising. Tasks should be specifically delegated in some detail and, initially, overlapping responsibilities should be avoided because they could create difficulties for Chinese colleagues. Check with them frequently to ferret out any problems. Chinese staff may be reluctant to mention any difficulties encountered that they cannot resolve. For Canadians, it means managing with a more hands-on approach than usual. But constant follow-up is common for Chinese people.

Be positive, patient, persistent, and always show goodwill. Set reasonable tasks and go slow. Celebrate accomplishments. Maintain your personal integrity. Be yourself, otherwise you may not be trusted since Chinese people have certain expectations of Canadian behaviour. Your behaviour will often be excused as, "Oh, that's just the Canadians doing their Canadian thing again."

Resist the feeling you are being "taken" all of the time. You may be reading more into the situation than is actually there. Try to find out more about the Chinese agenda through a third person you trust.

It is important that you "pick your spots." You may unnecessarily burden Chinese staff by suggesting too many changes, some that might not be critical to what you want to achieve. You may burn up a lot of good will and may not be able to implement changes that really matter to you, at a later date.

If you are introducing changes based on your Canadian experience, explain clearly why Canadians value doing things in certain ways, and do it in a way that no one loses face. Some Canadian advisors have used proverbs and stories from Chinese history and culture to rationalize management changes or new practices and proce-

dures. People may be more inclined to accept a Canadian perspective or innovation when it is explained in images that fit their map of social reality.

The most successful projects are those that have a sound design and full participation from both sides from the beginning. It is crucial that everyone in the organization is on-side and committed. A project that is poorly designed, or one the Chinese never really wanted, will always be difficult to manage effectively.

You may find your Chinese colleagues willing to take initiative only if you accept full accountability for their actions, ensuring they will not be held responsible or blamed. Canadians, accustomed to strict invoice controls and audits, will discover that "bending the rules" or, in some cases, simply ignoring them is not necessarily wrong from the Chinese point of view. Practices such as inventing receipts or invoices and offering bribes are often considered expedient in China if they resolve problems or benefit the project. (For example, project goods or equipment in the possession of individuals are made available for an inventory check or an inspection tour, and returned to the individuals afterwards.) As a Canadian manager, you will have the difficult task of drawing the line on such practices in order to protect the integrity of your records.

Meetings ◆ ◆ ◆

In general, most meetings in China are not an effective means to generate discussion and make decisions. The Chinese may be reluctant to attend, and equally reluctant to listen attentively. People use meetings as opportunities to sleep, read the newspaper, and day-dream. Those who attend are not expected to contribute or listen carefully. This is a well-honed technique developed over many years of having to sit and suffer through political meetings, where the speaker at the front of the room drones on, without pausing for discussion. A meeting could best be described as an opportunity to demonstrate group harmony or take a group photo.

Some of the greatest difficulties and misunderstandings between Chinese and Canadians occur at meetings. The Chinese find Canadians conduct themselves in an egocentric, undisciplined fashion at meetings, insisting on their point of view and standing out as individuals. This conduct is contrary to the Chinese norms of modesty and group values. Chinese people will voice opinions at meetings

but only in the absence of their leaders. They may also speak up if they trust you to be discrete with their comments.

Your Chinese partners may have difficulty with meetings held in a western style. Canadian technical advisors have indicated that meetings are usually held only to give official approval to what has already been negotiated beforehand. There should be no surprises or new material introduced at such meetings. Partners attending the meeting may not have the authority to commit to binding decisions and will be embarrassed or lose face if they are pressed to do so.

Do what can be done, informally, face-to-face. Meet in plenary only when necessary. Take written notes and confirm with your counterparts that what you thought happened at the meeting really did happen.
The highest ranking person in your group should lead the way in, and be the spokesperson. Do not make the mistake of shaking hands with the interpreter first.

Meetings always begin with informal chitchat over tea. The host will initiate serious talk (an introduction), and then leave time for you to say a few words in response. Respect these exchanges of courtesy. Drink the tea that is served before launching into an explanation of why you have come (you might not even get to it at the first meeting). You may meet an important official only for a few minutes. Time is tight for senior people. Be alert for signals that the meeting should end. The signals include asking you if you would like more tea, beginning to sum things up, thanking you for coming, and leading you to the door. Don't be surprised if you meet for only a few minutes but are invited to dinner that evening. This is the beginning of your relationship. Business will come later.

Negotiations ◆ ◆ ◆

Negotiations in China can be a grinding, slow process. Chinese negotiating style is highly structured. It comes from military strategy with which all Chinese are familiar. Negotiators may play on your impatience and your sense of shame. They may threaten to take their business elsewhere. Be wary of the responsibility entailed when you become a "trusted old friend." An obligation has been built up. Do not confuse real friendship with business friendship.

Chinese people view negotiations as important social occasions, to foster relationships. They have to convince themselves about the suitability of the

partner, and nurture the kind of interpersonal sensitivity, harmony, mutual obligation, and durability that ideally characterizes all Chinese relationships. They learn much about their prospective partners from casual situations, such as banquets, where their guests are more relaxed and likely to reveal themselves.

Chinese contracts are short, written in simple language, and focus on principles. Western business language is obtuse and legalistic. The two conflicting perspectives are major obstacles when conducting business. Chinese people believe Canadians spend too much time negotiating details which, in the end, may prove irrelevant. They view the contract as the starting point and have no inhibitions about putting demands on the "relationship" or suggesting changes later. The terms and conditions of a specific contract are not necessarily binding because the contract applies more to the relationship. If circumstances change, even long after the contract is signed and work has begun, the agreement may become meaningless.

Expect lots of delays. If you encounter no immediate response, you would be wise not to push it. Chinese negotiators have little room to manoeuvre. Delays are often caused by the need to seek approval at various steps along the way. Be patient. The Chinese have a saying: "With one monkey in the way, not even 10,000 men can pass."

Positions may change during negotiations. If, the next day, you see a complete turnaround, you can be sure you are negotiating with people who do not have the power to make decisions. If you have a good relationship with your partners, they will help you navigate through the red tape to the best of their ability and *guanxi*.

If you must break off negotiations, do so carefully. Do not close the door on future cooperation. Seeking legal council is a public admission that the relationship has failed. You both lose face as a consequence.

SOCIAL CONVENTIONS AND PROTOCOL

> *There are 300 rules of major ritual, and 3,000 minor observances that are to be mastered.*
> -The Analects of Confucius

Greetings and Farewells ◆ ◆ ◆

The common greeting for any occasion is *nin hao*, hello. Shaking hands is standard practice, though Chinese people tend to hold on longer than Canadians, and will sometimes use both hands to show special warmth. Women do not always shake hands; a bow of the head is also a polite greeting. Avoid hugging or kissing, except with very close friends. Offer your business card with both hands.

Good-byes are short and sweet. No need to make excuses, just announce your intention, and go. It is polite to express your farewell as meeting someone else's need, as in, "I have taken up too much of your valuable time; I really must go." If your Chinese host offers to make more tea, stands up, or thanks you for coming, that is the end of the meeting. Politely decline the tea and leave. A host will often escort a guest to the car to show respect.

Politeness (Keqi) and Ritual ◆ ◆ ◆

It is important to understand and follow the rules of politeness, *keqi*, and rituals which govern every valued relationship. Extreme politeness and humility are the norm. Foreigners may see *keqi* as a hackneyed game. You may, at first, find the rituals and protocol off-putting, but understand that *keqi* pervades every social and business relationship in China. The *keqi* "game" can be fun, and easily turned to your advantage.

One businessman could not understand how his hosts would always be outside his hotel room ready to greet him each morning. One day he rose early and discovered the secret. He heard footsteps approaching his room. It was a junior member of the host organization, arriving very early to listen outside his door for the first signs that he was awake. He then sent for the others to be ready to greet the foreign guest.

Hosts have been known to plan events in minute detail. They know exactly how long each event will take, who has to be where, and when. Canadians doing business in China are likely to find that their Chinese hosts have organized every minute of their time. The practice elicits various reactions, ranging from mild discomfort, feeling one's independence challenged, to paranoia ("they are always watching me").

Be polite, considerate, humble and understanding, even if you are not feeling that way. You can decline a last minute invitation if your schedule does not permit it. If you have flexibility, it is best to accept it because declining could be interpreted as a sign that you are dissatisfied with your business dealings, or that you have been offended. If you must decline, point out that you would have been able to attend had you been given prior notice.

Back Door ◆ ◆ ◆

The back door, *hou men*, is invariably part of doing business in China and usually involves a pay-off. Using the back door provides a means to circumvent the bureaucracy in order to get things done more efficiently. Generally, rules are unclear and unwritten, allowing considerable flexibility to work the system. But some foreign advisors believe that using *hou men* is illegal or immoral, and refuse to participate. Examples of the back door? Getting a telephone installed may require the payment of money, cigarettes or lunch. Getting things released from customs can be faster when cigarettes are provided to well-placed individuals. (Smoking may go against your personal principles, but be aware that cigarettes are often used as a form of currency.)

Most often, Canadians who choose to use the back door will not be involved directly in the transactions. They will be taken care of by the office "fixer," someone who has impeccable *guanxi*.

Banquets ◆ ◆ ◆

Chinese people are understandably proud of their cuisine, and they want you to share in the experience. Banquets are used to greet old friends, start new relationships, or to show appreciation. They can also be used when negotiations are rocky. It is meant to signal that the relationship is expected to survive and prosper despite any difficulties.

Chinese organizations often have large hospitality budgets. Entertaining guests at banquets is an entrenched way of doing business in China. Some Canadians express reservations about accepting this hospitality when they see China's pressing social and economic problems. (In 1991, the hospitality budget of Hubei province exceeded its education budget.) It would be considered a great insult, however, not to accept this hospitality.

You will cement the relationship by being polite, grateful and gracious, and by making the right toasts and speeches. Speeches are short and contain little substance. The primary function is to thank your host and convey your sincere appreciation. An appropriate time to speak is usually during the soup or dessert, but make sure your host has already spoken first.

Avoid talk related to business unless your host initiates it. Avoid controversial topics. If your host asks you personal or prying questions about your family or finances, for example, don't take offense; there is little privacy in China. Politely answer, perhaps prefacing your reply with information about Canadian ways.

Banquets are always held in restaurants or hotels where food is shared at large round tables. The place of honour is always to the right of the host. In western cultures, the host or guest of honour sits at the head of the table, but in China, he or she sits in the chair facing the door. Wait to be seated.

Don't praise food you don't like or your hosts will serve it to you at every subsequent banquet. If you have special dietary requirements, let your hosts know beforehand. Don't protest when someone offers you food, they will think you are just being polite. Take it, with thanks. You don't have to eat it. Leaving food on your plate is not impolite. It merely indicates you have eaten your fill.

Traditionally, the number of dishes served was the sign of the host's affluence and generosity. Sometimes twenty or more would be served. Today, banquets of this proportion are rare. Still, the principle remains and formal banquets usually offer many dishes. Your hosts will feel responsible and want you to eat well. They will continuously put food in your dish and encourage you to eat more. They will expect you to try every dish, even those your western palate may object to, so pace yourself to ensure you don't falter before the last dish is served. Above all, enjoy the banquet spirit. And watch the *ganbei*! This drink can be potent.

Ice water, coffee and after-dinner drinks are almost never served. You can ask for a fork, but it would be better to struggle with chopsticks and have your host offer to get you one. Canadian table manners do not apply. Belching, smacking, slurping, and smoking at the table are permissible.

Banquets are usually held in the evening between 5:30 and 8:00. You can generally be assured of being back to your hotel or residence early. (Many guests rely on public transit to get home.) The host always pays, and payment is arranged in advance.

Be forewarned. The evening's entertainment may include your singing a "traditional" Canadian folk song. You can refuse, but if you accept, you will be remembered fondly.

Gift-giving ◆ ◆ ◆

Carry small gifts. Anything with Canadian content (stamp or coin sets, calendars, pens or pins) is a big hit. You can offer one for everyone in the party greeting you. At least be sure there is one for the host. Gifts are given in the order of people's importance.

Wrapped gifts will not be opened until everyone has departed, so if you have a gift that requires explanation, present it unwrapped so you can explain. Gifts sometimes have to be offered two or three times before they are accepted. (This is to show that the recipient is unworthy and that they will have to be coaxed.)

Anything over 200 yuan is considered expensive and carries an obligation with it. Avoid giving or receiving expensive gifts. It may be difficult to refuse without offending the gift-giver so, if you need an excuse, say that your office does not permit you to accept gifts. If you give a gift, don't expect a thank-you since thanks are expressed in more tangible ways such as reciprocal favours and gifts.

Business Cards ◆ ◆ ◆

Carry lots of business cards. Have them translated into Chinese before leaving Canada, if possible. The exchange of cards makes it easier for you and your host to remember and pronounce names. At meetings, Chinese people often arrange their guests' business cards on the table in front of them. It is a sign if respect and helps them keep track of names. You can do the same. You should, in fact, examine each card carefully and respectfully, and keep it beside you.

COPING

The Chinese attitude towards strangers, whether they are Chinese or foreigners, can be difficult for Canadians to comprehend. In China, people generally look out for themselves without concern for the needs of others. Confucius states: "Do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you." This is a negative rule that prohibits harmful acts more than it encourages helpful ones. As a result, refuse is cast onto streets because sweeping the streets is someone else's concern. Public toilets are usually filthy, again, because cleaning them is someone else's responsibility. Bicycles and cars may be parked where they block other people's progress.

Canadians in China frequently comment on these problems and find them offensive. Chinese people may not appreciate them, either. As a newcomer to China, it will be one more difference you will have to get used to.

Culture shock is often an accumulation of day-to-day frustrations and difficulty. Most foreign experts find there are times when they cannot bring themselves to go outside their apartments or hotels. Reasons vary from not wanting to endure surly service in stores, congested streets or bad air, to not wanting to be on public display. As a foreigner, you will be an object of great curiosity. You *will* be stared at.

As a way of easing your transition, bring photos of family and friends, reading material, comfort foods, music, favourite toys, spices, or sports equipment. Try to recapture some of the things familiar to you. Cook western food at home or obtain Canadian newspapers or magazines. Some people reject this strategy at first because they believe it diminishes the cultural experience. Still, it may help.

Develop a project for yourself. If you are planning to collect something, study Chinese, or travel, prepare in advance by bringing books and materials with you from Canada. Try to learn the language. It will make life a little easier (and may even impress your Chinese partners). Maintain a sense of humour. Seek support from friends and colleagues. Remember, you are not alone. China can be a very social place. There is a slower pace of life with more time to devote to friends. Enjoy!

CONCLUSION

For those going to China for business or pleasure, this guide has offered some advice as well as some insights into the country, its people, and their culture.

Regardless of your expertise, your ability, or your credentials, your success in China will depend on your attitude. Observe, learn and try to understand, before assuming China needs you to solve all its problems. Establish trust with your Chinese colleagues. If you are sensitive and willing to adapt, you will open the door to a rich and rewarding experience.

May your stay in China be enjoyable!

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